



Choose Your Instructor Carefully

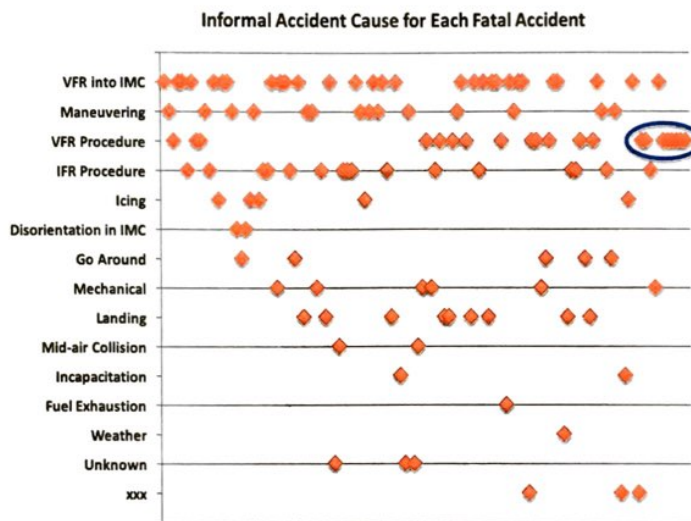
by RICK BEACH, COPA Safety Chair



A recent cluster of instructor-involved fatal accidents call out for intervention. While preliminary, we can ask questions before we fly with an instructor who might not keep us safe.

Surprising Cluster of Cirrus Fatal Accidents

While updating my chart of informal causes of Cirrus fatal accidents, a cluster of recent events caught my attention.



Scatter diagram of informal causes of Cirrus fatal accidents by sequence number of the accident. Each diamond marker reflects my assignment of what the pilot was doing that resulted in a fatal accident. The recent cluster of VFR Procedure accidents is highlighted by a blue oval.

These informal causes were my attempts to identify what Cirrus pilots were doing in loss-of-control accidents. For example, the VFR into IMC accidents were pretty obvious, although fewer of them have happened in the past few years.

The cluster of recent VFR Procedure accidents jumped out at me. Eight of the most recent 14 fatal accidents involved VFR Procedures – many stall/spin accidents in the traffic pattern. What shocked me was how many of them involved instructors in the right seat!

Cirrus Accidents with Instructors on Board

Cirrus fatal accidents with instructors has happened occasionally throughout the years. My records show 18 of 119 fatal Cirrus accidents had a CFI on board. For the first 10 years, we averaged one accident every two years with an instructor involved.

What was surprising was discovering that seven of the 14 (half) of the most recent fatal accidents had instructors in the right seat. That was seven in 24 months, a much higher rate than ever before. Most of these accidents have only preliminary investigation reports, so we do not yet know much about the pilot under training or instructor, nor the circumstances in the accident chain.

From preliminary reports, here's a synopsis of the seven most recent instructor-involved accidents:

- **Madrid-Cuatro Vientos, Spain:** a checkout in a flying club airplane.
- **South Korea:** a flight school airplane with three fatalities.
- **Marion, IL:** power-off descent to landing from 3,000 feet, possibly part of practice for a commercial pilot certificate.
- **Navasota, TX:** transition training with an experienced and highly regarded instructor who was not known to have any Cirrus time-in-type.
- **Lake Wales, FL:** aborted emergency landing following loss of engine power involving glass cockpit training of pilot leading to a regional airline job.
- **Riyadh, Saudi Arabia:** military training flight.
- **Grover Hill, OH:** icing accident with the Cirrus pilot flying with his instructor friend.

Two glaring details show up. One is the average age of those planes was about 10 years. The other was few of those pilots were COPA members and none were known to have attended a COPA safety event.

While we do not know many details, the circumstances prompt me to ask numerous questions about these accidents.

Legal versus Safe

During research for this article, an NTSB investigator told me that any CFI is required to have five hours in type before they can give instruction. Sounded pretty low to me, so I checked.

Wrong!

Flight instructors are required by FAR 61.195 to have five hours in type when instructing a pilot in a *multiengine airplane, helicopter or powered lift*. I found no similar requirement for *single-engine airplane*. None.

So, it seems legal for you to fly a Cirrus with an instructor in the right seat who has no experience in a Cirrus, even if they have lots of hours of dual-instruction given. But is that safe? My personal expectation of instructors would require that they teach me something about the Cirrus airplane I am flying and how I am flying it. That isn't likely if they have very low or no time in a Cirrus.

Syllabus? What Syllabus?

When transitioning or training in a Cirrus, does the instructor use a syllabus that relates to the Cirrus airplane you are flying? Does that matter to you?

Cirrus Aircraft publishes syllabi for several transition and recurrent training tasks. All Cirrus Standardized Instructors, whether independent CSIPs or Cirrus Training ▶